

Introduction

1. Last year while running on the Creeper Trail, I was nearing a mile marker, and I looked down at my running watch to press the button so that I could see my time on that mile.
 - a. When I looked down at my watch, I took my eyes off of the trail.
 - b. I didn't see that rock sticking up, and I stubbed my toe directly on it.
 - c. I did my Superman impression as I went flying through the air.
 - d. I landed on my hands and knees which were left scraped, cut, and bleeding.
 - e. Likewise, when we take our eyes off of where we're going with the Lord and look to other things in life, we are likely to stumble in our faith walk.
2. In today's passage, Jesus told His disciples that they should never do or say anything that would cause another Christian or themselves to stumble in the walk of faith.
3. **Read Mk 9:42-50.**

A. Causing Others to Stumble (42)

1. In this verse, Jesus focused on things that believers say or do that cause others to stumble into sin by losing faith.
2. Who is "one of these little ones" to whom Jesus refers?
 - a. little one (Gk., *mikron*) = lit. "small." This word is the root for the "micro" in "microscope." A microscope helps us see small, microscopic things.
 - b. Jesus qualified this term further by saying they are ". . . those who believe in me."
 - c. In context, this term applies to any follower of Jesus, a Christian.
3. How can we cause other Christians to "stumble"?
 - a. "stumble" (Gk., *skandalise*) – lit. "to fall into a trap." This word refers to a stumbling block that causes one to trip, fall, or be trapped.
 - b. Jesus did not speak of a physical fall/trap but a falling away from faith that traps one in sin.
 - c. When we say or do something that causes another believer to loose faith or to turn from the faith, we have caused them to stumble.
 - d. In Mk 9:38, John, one of Jesus's disciples, had seen a man casting out a demon in Jesus' name and commanded that man to stop.
 - 1) By questioning the man's faith and commanding him to stop acting in faith, John may well have caused this man to stumble.
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe elaborates, "Jesus did not treat John's statement lightly; in fact, He went on to explain the danger of causing others to stumble and therefore stop serving the Lord (Mark 9:42-50). . . . The way believers treat others in the family of God is a serious thing, and God wants us to 'have peace with one another' (Mark 9:50). The disciples did not get along with each other, nor did they get along with other believers! (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 111).
 - 3) Daniel Akin adds, "I believe Jesus is still speaking to John, and the issue is still pride. God's wrath is great against it because it does so much harm. If we do not rid ourselves of the sin that took both Satan and Adam down, we will be a stumbling block to others, and God will hold us accountable." (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 197).
4. A better fate for one causing another Christian to stumble would be to have ". . . a large millstone . . . hung around their neck and . . . [be] thrown into the sea."
5. The physically horrible fate of drowning in the sea right now would be preferable to the horrible spiritual fate waiting in the final judgment for anyone who caused another believer to stumble.

B. Causing Ourselves to Stumble (43-48)

1. In these verses Jesus turned from actions that cause others to stumble in their faith to actions that cause each of us to stumble in our faith.
2. Jesus used three parts of the human body to illustrate things that cause us to stumble into sin.
 - a. A Hand (43-44) – Your hand can cause you to stumble into unfaithfulness/sin as you do things that are sinful or fail to do things that are good.
 - b. A Foot (45-46) – Your foot/feet can cause you to stumble into unfaithfulness/sin as you go to places where you will sin or as you fail to go to places where you will do God’s work.
 - c. An Eye (47-48) – Your eye/eyes can cause you to stumble into unfaithfulness/sin as you look at things which tempt you to go to places you should not go and to do things that you should not do. Our eyes can also cause us to be unfaithful as we fail to see the world and others through the eyes of Christ.
3. John later summarized things that lead us into sin – “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 Jn 2:16).
 - a. Our eyes look on the world in search of satisfaction and pleasure for our flesh.
 - b. Our feet and hands take us to places where we can reach out and take what we want.
 - c. In our pride, we believe that we know best and will face no consequences but only gain pleasure in all that we see, in the places that we go, and in all that we do to satisfy ourselves.
4. The harsh remedy that Jesus proposes is to destroy the parts of our body that cause us to stumble.
 - a. He calls for us to “cut off” (Gk., *apokophon*) an offending hand or foot and to “pluck out” (Gk., *ekbale*) a wayward eye that leads us to sin.
 - b. What does Jesus mean? Are we to take these sayings literally?
 - 1) Apparently not since most of us have both hands, both feet, and both eyes.
 - 2) We must “cut off” these offending parts figuratively/metaphorically.
 - 3) Jesus meant that sacrificing the short-term pleasures of sin is better than facing the long-term consequences of sin.
 - 4) Do not do what is sinful. Do not go where you will fall into sin. Do not look at things that cause you to sin.
 - 5) Give up the so-called pleasures of sin because they only lead to ultimate suffering.
 - c. Wiersbe states, “This solemn message about hell carries a warning to all of us to deal drastically with sin. Whatever in our lives makes us stumble, and therefore causes others to stumble, must be removed as if by surgery. . . . Of course, the Lord is not commanding literal physical surgery, since He had already made it clear that sin comes from the heart (Mark 7:20-23). What He is teaching is that sin is to the inner person what a cancerous tumor is to the body, and it must be dealt with drastically” (Wiersbe, 111).
5. Notice the recurring phrase in verses 43, 45, and 47 with slight variation: “It is better for you to enter life/the kingdom of God maimed/crippled/with one hand/foot/eye than to have two hands/two feet/two eyes and go/be thrown into hell.”
 - a. “hell” (Gk., *geenna*) – This Greek word comes from the Hebrew phrase *ge hinnom* which means “Valley of Hinnom.”
 - 1) This valley outside the wall of Jerusalem was the trash dump and place of burial for unclaimed corpses. It was an awfully smelly and disgusting place.
 - 2) On a recent hike, we passed by a feeder lot for cattle. The disgusting smell there reminded me of a dump and the awful stomach-turning smell that must also have been in the Valley of Hinnom.
 - 3) Wiersbe notes that the Valley of Hinnom was “an actual valley outside Jerusalem where wicked King Ahaz worshipped Molech, the fire god, and even sacrificed his children in the fire (2 Chron. 28:1-3; Jer. 7:31; 32:35)” (Wiersbe, 112).
 - 4) So, in the Old Testament Gehenna “. . . became a symbol of final judgment (Isa 31:9; Jer 7:31-32; 19:6)” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 198).

- b. Jesus said hell is “. . . where ‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” (48)
- 1) The KJV includes these words as verses 44 and 46, but these verses are omitted in more modern translations such as the NIV. Why?
 - a) The Greek manuscripts available to the KJV translators had these phrases in them but older manuscripts found since the translation of the KJV did not include them.
 - b) Whether we read this phrase three times or only once, there is no change in the meaning or application of this passage.
 - 2) Wiersbe notes, “Hell is not temporary; it is forever (see Rev. 20:10). How essential it is for sinners to trust Jesus Christ and be delivered from eternal hell, and how important it is for believers to get the message out to a lost world!” (Wiersbe, 112)
 - 3) In this verse Jesus quoted from the last verse of Isaiah (i.e., Is 66:24).
 - a) In fuller context Isaiah wrote, “‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the Lord, ‘so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the Lord. ‘And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind’” (Is 66:22-24).
 - b) Both the worms and the fire are symbolic of complete destruction.
 - c) Isaiah 66, the last chapter of Isaiah, looks to the final judgment; the end of this world; the hope of eternal life for those who know the Lord; and the eternal judgment for those who do not.

C. Fire and Salt (49-50)

1. Jesus next proclaimed that “Everyone will be salted with fire.” (49)
 - a. The connection with verse 48 is the catchword “fire,” but the meaning of the word fire has changed.
 - 1) We must interpret this verse separately from verse 48 to understand it properly.
 - 2) In verse 49 fire refers not to judgment and destruction as in verse 48 but to preservation.
 - c. Wiersbe states, “The Jews were not allowed to put leaven or honey on their sacrifices, but they were required to use salt (Lev. 2:11, 13). Salt speaks of purity and preservation. It was used in Old Testament days in the establishing of covenants” (Wiersbe, 112).
 - d. Akin adds “‘Salt’ is a preservative. Thus all will be ‘salted with fire’ in a manner consistent with their relationship to Christ. For unbelievers it will be the perpetual fires of final judgment in hell. For the disciple it will be the preserving and refining fires of trials and suffering that mark the road to true greatness. This saying is found only in Mark’s Gospel. It must have held special significance for him and Peter” (Akin, 198).
 - e. We are called by God to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (cf. Ro 12:1) salted with the flavor of the gospel by humble service in Jesus’ name.
2. Jesus next asked a question, “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?” (50a)
 - a. Of course, Jesus expected a negative reply.
 - b. This saying sounds much like Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount where He said, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot” (Mt 5:13).
 - c. Wiersbe notes, “The disciples were God’s salt (Matt. 5:13), but they were in danger of losing their flavor and becoming worthless. Our salt today is purified and does not lose its taste, but the salt of that day contained impurities and could lose its flavor. Once you have lost the precious Christian character, how will you restore it? . . . Instead of rebuking others, the disciples should have been examining their own hearts!” (Wiersbe, 112).
 - d. James Brooks adds, “Pure salt cannot lose its saltiness. What was used as salt in ancient times, however, and especially what was gathered from the Dead Sea in Palestine, contained many impurities. If the true salt were removed, what remained might still look like salt but could not perform the life-giving and life-saving function of salt. A person may have the external appearance of a disciple, but not the internal properties” (Brooks, *Mark*, 154).

3. Finally, Jesus gave a positive command, “Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other” (50b).
 - a. Preserve your relationships with others in the Lord.
 - b. Flavor your life in community with other believers with the love and self-sacrificial attitude of Christ.
 - c. These salty things lead to “peace” (Gk., *eireneo*) in personal relationships and in the body of Christ.
 - d. Brooks states, “Peace (reconciliation) is disrupted by ambition to be great in a worldly fashion; it is promoted by the servant attitude” (Brooks, 154).
 - e. William Lane adds, “Strife is resolved and peace restored when men recognize in one another a common commitment to Jesus and the gospel, and to the servant’s vocation” (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 350).

D. Reflections

1. What tempts you?
 - a. Where are you tempted to go; to do; to look at?
 - b. How do you avoid temptation?
 - c. Where should you be going; What should you be doing; How should you be looking at the world and others?
2. How salty is your salt?
 - a. Do you have the external appearance of a disciple, but not the internal properties?
 - b. What do you need to do or commit to be in order to stay salty in the Lord?
3. Who is God placing in your life that needs preserving and flavoring with the love of Christ that you have to share?
4. What other individual Christian or Christian group have you in the past or do you see right now as an adversary?
 - a. You can and must actively seek to be at peace with this person or group.
 - b. You can find this peace as you focus on all that you have in common with this person or group in Jesus Christ.
 - c. You are called to share ministry together as members of the Lord’s one body and in His holy name.